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Prospectus

for the

Four Rivers Charter School

A Regional Charter School for Franklin County

Greenfield, Massachusetts

Submitted September 18, 2001

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Charter Applicant Information Sheet

This sheet must be attached to the prospectus and final application. Please type information.

Name of Proposed Charter School FOUR RIVERS CHARTER SCHOOL

School Address (if known) ______

School Location (City/Town) GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

Name of Group Applying for the Charter FOUR RIVERS CHARTER SCHOOL-FOUNDING GROUP

Contact Person EDWARD BLATCHFORD

Address 286 PATTEN ROAD

City SHELBURNE State MA Zip 01370

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The proposed school will open in the fall of school year: ☐ 2002-03 ☐ 2003-04

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	7-8	60
Second Year	7-9	90
Third Year	7-10	120
Fourth Year	7-11	150
Fifth Year	7-12	180

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MA Department of Education
Charter School Office

Commonwealth charter applicants only:

Will this school be a Regional Charter School? ☒ Yes ☐ No

School Districts from which students are expected to come (use additional sheets if necessary):

GREENFIELD
MOHAWK TRAIL
GILL - MONTAGUE
FRONTIER
PIONEER VALLEY
RALPH C. MAHAR

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Commonwealth Charter School Certification Statement

Proposed Charter School Name FOUR RIVERS CHARTER SCHOOL

Proposed School Location (City/Town) GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

I hereby certify that the information submitted in this application is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; that this application has been or is being sent to the superintendent of all the districts from which we intend to draw students; and further I understand that, if awarded a charter, the proposed school shall be open to all students on a space available basis, and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, or proficiency in the English language, and academic achievement. This is a true statement, made under the penalties of perjury.

Signature of Authorized Person Edward W. Blatchford Date 9/17/01

Print/Type Name EDWARD W. BLATCHFORD

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Executive Summary

Mission statement

The Four Rivers Charter School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school will offer a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes - nature, technology and community - will pervade the teaching and learning at the school, engaging students and teachers in a fundamental question of our times: how do we find the healthy, fruitful interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community? The school will work closely with parents and will seek both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.

Purposes

The purpose of the Four Rivers Charter School is to provide a new middle and high school opportunity in Franklin County, where no charter school currently exists. Opening in 2002 with 60 studernts in grades 7 and 8, Four Rivers will add a grade each year, attaining its full enrollment of 180 students in 2006. The school will offer solid preparation in the core academic disciplines so that students are fully prepared for college or other post-secondary opportunities. We have chosen the themes of nature, technology and community particularly because they speak directly to concerns and opportunities that face us now and will face our children more urgently in the future: as our use and reliance upon technology (here defined as systems of human invention) grows, how do we find the balance between the natural world and the world of technology, a world we are constantly inventing and reinventing? This question is particularly important to the people of Franklin County, which is poised for revitalization and development, yet has a bucolic and rich natural beauty and small town character that residents here want to preserve.

We believe that a challenging academic program that is solidly grounded in both theory and practice, character development, and service to the communities will foster in our students clear, enlivened thinking, the ability to ask important questions and seek answers with rigor and focus, and the willingness and skill to collaborate with others. We seek to create a school with permeable borders that allow information, talent and skills to come into the school from the community and out of the school to the community.

Academic Standards

Using the standards of the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and the design principles and core practices of Expeditionary Learning as guides, we will create intensive interdisciplinary courses of study that include both classroom study and extensive fieldwork, and will provide a particularly strong emphasis on writing, reading and math skills through daily classes. Students will gain knowledge of facts and concepts and then enact what they have learned through the design and execution of projects. The Expeditionary Learning model is expressive of our vision of an effective and meaningful education well suited to the character and population of Franklin County.

Expected Outcomes

Students at Four Rivers will achieve competence in math, writing, reading, history and social sciences, science and technology, and will score at or above the proficient level on the MCAS exam. As importantly, students will have the practical and thinking skills to make use of what they know. We will graduate resourceful, skilled, deeply curious and highly engaged young people who are prepared to take their place in, care for, and help to shape the communities in which they live.

I. Charter school mission statement and purposes

Four Rivers Charter School Mission

The Four Rivers Charter School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school will offer a rigorous academic program aligned with Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes--nature, technology and community--will pervade teaching and learning at the school, engaging students and teachers in a fundamental question of our times: how do we find the healthy, fruitful interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community? The school will work closely with parents and will seek both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.

Purposes

The Four Rivers Charter School, a regional Commonwealth charter school serving 180 students in grades 7-12 from Franklin County, has the following purposes:

1) Academic: To provide a solid preparation in the core academic disciplines so that students are prepared for college, work or other post-secondary opportunities and that they perform successfully on MCAS and other assessments; to foster clear, enlivened thinking, in which questions are embraced with openness and wonder, answers are sought with rigor and respect for truth, and collaboration with others is encouraged; and to develop the skills and attitudes for lifelong learning.

2) Character: To help students recognize their own “genius,” the particular strengths they bring; to develop abilities to work and play cooperatively with others; to awaken students to their moral compass by emphasizing the virtues of courage, respect, responsibility and compassion; and to train students in the process of making healthy choices.

3) Themes: To engage deeply and creatively in study and fieldwork involving the school’s three themes of nature, technology and community, as they appear within our immediate community and more widely in our culture; and to develop projects or proposals demonstrating balanced and sustainable interworking of these themes.

4) Service to the Franklin County community: To provide an educational alternative to students of Franklin County and their families; as part of the school’s program to seek opportunities for service to and participation in the community life, businesses and natural resources of the county; and with time to provide educational programs and models that may be of help to other schools and individuals in the area.

II. How will the school demonstrate academic success?

A. Learning standards

Describe the school's learning standards.

The learning standards of Four Rivers Charter School follow from the school's mission and represent the school's commitment to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and preparation for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Included here are statements of what students in our educational program should know and be able to do at the end of 9th grade in the core areas of History and Social Science, Science and Technology, English Languare Arts, and Mathematics. Other subject areas are described more briefly. The school's learning standards will be continually reviewed and strengthened by the school's faculty as part of their ongoing effort to fulfill the school's mission of a rigorous academic program.

History and Social Science

Knowledge: Students will gain basic knowledge in U.S. and world history, history of science and technology, geography, economics, civics and government. They will learn the chronology and cause of key historical events and be able to understand those events in context. They will understand the principles and operations of the American systems of government and justice. They will also understand the relationship between the physical features of the each and the development of civilization, and ways in which geographical, scientific and technological changes have impacted the world in which we live.

Skills: Students will develop research skills, including how to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, how to search libraries and on-line resources, and how to evaluate quality of internet and other sources. They will also learn to identify, research, and make proposals on local issues involving nature, technology and community.

Values: Students will understand the importance of individual choices, actions and character and will recognize the effect of certain human actions in the world. They will recognize the rights and responsibilities of individuals, the ideals of community, the diversity of cultures, and the transmission of learning through cultural/social interaction.

Science and Technology

Knowledge: In the domains of science, students will learn the following:
- Life science: characteristics of organisms, including diversity and adaptation, reproduction and development, principles of heredity and evolution; also study ecosystems, including matter and energy in ecosystems.
- Physical science: properties and structure of matter; forces and motion; interaction of substances (chemical/physical changes); conservation and transmission of energy.
- Earth and space sciences: matter and energy in the Earth system; geochemical processes and cycles in the Earth system; Earth's history and evolution of the universe.
- In the strand of technology: historical impact on local communities; successful implementations of tools, machines, and communications; sustainable resources of power, materials, people, information; the nature of true innovation.

Skills: Students will be able to use the methods of inquiry to participate in scientific investigation and technological problem-solving.

Values: Students will understand questions and problems of science and technology in the context of human affairs and the natural world.

English Language Arts

Knowledge: Students will learn to respond thoughtfully to all forms of spoken and written literature. They will learn to interpret an author's meaning, theme, tone and point of view, and will study various genres of fiction, non-fiction, film and media for structure and content. They will study myths, stories, poetry, novels and drama from various cultures. They will come to understand the structure of the English language and deveop their vocabularies for reading, writng and speaking. They will learn standard English conventions for sentence structure, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, and understand the elements of a well-constructed paragraph and longer compositions. Students will gain understanding of the flexibility and power of language to describe, convince, and inform, and they will learn to recognize their own voices as writers. They will also bring their critical understanding to the study of the electronic media.

Skills: Students will learn to write with clarity, coherence and personal engagement. Following stages in the writing process, they will be able to write creatively and construct clear, logically developed essays and edit their own and peers' writing. They will also learn the basics of writing research papers. They will be able to speak well in various forms, from discussion to debate and dramatic readings.

Values: Student will understand how literature reflects the mores and values of society, and how through reading and writing they experience other perspectives than their own. They will learn the power of language to shape understanding and recognize their responsibililty to use language with integrity and respect.

Mathematics

Knowledge: Students should know and be able to do the following by the end of 9th grade:

Number sense: Compute with whole numbers, fractions, decimals, integers, rational and signed numbers; apply ratios, proportions and percents; represent and analyze finite graphs, using matrices.

Patterns, relations and functions describe and represent relationships with models, tables, graphs and rules, word problems, using algebraic expressions; solve and graph linear equations, quadratic equations, and inequalities; use tables and graphs as tools to interpret expressions; simplify algebraic expressions; apply trigonometry to problem situations involving right triangles.

Geometry and measurement: visualize, draw, and transform geometric figures; solve problems using geometric models; explain the Pythagorean theorem; solve for perimeter, area, volume, angle measure, capacity, density, weight and mass; use and convert English and metric forms of measure; classify figures in terms of congruence and similarity; construct indirect and inductive proofs.

*Statistics and probability:*construct, read and interpret tables, charts, graphs; make inferences and convincing arguments that are based on data analysis; use sampling to make statistical claims; design, conduct and interpret a statistical experiment and communicate the outcomes; determine the likelihood of outcomes using theoretical probabilities.

Skills: Students will be able to identify and apply: number relationships, algebraic expressions, geometric principles and statistical methodologies. They will be able to use highly ordered thinking as a tool for the organization and presentation of ideas. Students will also be skilled in a variety of approaches to problem solving.

Values: Students will learn to sharpen thinking to an objective, formal level. Social implications of rational thought as opposed to emotional response will be explored.

World Language: The school will begin with Spanish as its world language and will expect students to learn to read, write, and converse in Spanish, as well as gain some understanding and

appreciation of Spanish-speaking cultures, including those within the local community.

Technology: Technology education will be interwoven with Science and other classes, and it will have specific afternoon periods of instruction and explorations in computer and new media technologies (including website design and use; core skills of wordprocessing, database and speadsheet; and multimedia design and presentations), as well as the more traditional applications of technology described in the Science learning standard and so in evidence locally.

Nature: Beyond study of the natural world in core classes and expeditions, there will be specific afternoon periods of instruction and explorationin nature awareness, tracking and outdoor living skills. This activity heightens students' abilites to observe, interpret, understand and be at home in their natural surroundings, and strengthens their attention in other settings.

Life Skills : As part of an advisory program, students will learn skills in setting personal goals, making healthy choices, resolving conflict, and working cooperatively. They will also learn to identify and affirm strengths in themselves and others and think critically about how peer, media and other cultural pressures impact their own moral values.

Physical education : Physical education classes and sports activities will take place at least twice each week to provide exercise, play games, learn skills and teamwork, and gain confidence in one's physical abilities, with an emphasis on reaching each student's "personal best."

Arts: In the early stages of the school, the visual and performing arts will be integrated into the other subjects by the faculty and with occasional help from visiting artists.

B. Educational program

The educational theory or approach guiding the educational program

The educational approach guiding the program of Four Rivers Charter School aligns squarely with the school's mission. Reflected in our mission and purposes and shaping our educational program are the following beliefs about teaching and learning:

- The core academic learning is best done through a combination of skills-based instruction and thematic experiences. Students need coherent, well-structured training in the essential skills of each discipline. When students are actively engaged in thematic, interdisciplinary experiences through which they discover and construct meaning, however, their skills grow stronger by application and their learning gains greater depth and power. Memorable learning--the kind that lasts and spawns more learning--comes when the student is creating, not simply receiving or practicing, and when his or her learning is centered on large ideas or important issues. Fieldwork, in which learning moves beyond the classroom into the community, strengthens students' understanding by giving context, immediacy, and a sense of consequence to the learning.

- The development of character is an essential part of education. Qualities such as courage, respect, responsibility and compassion enable a student to learn to his or her fullest. As well, these qualities allow others to learn, and the overall culture of a school is enhanced when each student and teacher is challenged to grow to his or her "personal best." Schools must be places of care and community, where the particular gifts of each person are encouraged to come forth and where a diversity of backgrounds, experiences and capabilities is embraced. Schools must also convey standards and expectations of behavior which are unequivocal and firm, with teachers and other adults in the school modeling the qualities of character they look for in the students.

- Questions give energy and direction to learning, and teachers and students are helped by developing essential questions within each topic or area of study. We believe the school as a whole

grows more effective, purposeful and distinctive by having an important guiding question at its heart. The question Four Rivers Charter School asks in its mission and program--how do we find the healthy, fruitful interrelaltionship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community?--arises from our conviction that young people want education to address complex and profound issues of real import, that they want to believe they can make a difference in the world, and that they actually can do substantive research and beneficial projects in response to this question now, as well as find direction for education and work that may be of still wider consequence in their future.

- Schools work best when they are small enough for everyone to know everyone else well, when they are strongly linked to the community in which they reside, and when they are clear enough in their methods and purposes so that students and families are choosing them positively. We see a strong sense of community--embracing students, faculty, parents, trustees, community members, visiting experts, and also embracing the natural resources, history, current needs and civic life of Franklin County--as a hallmark of our school. Through this community, we seek to bring an ethic of service into our learning. We see learning at Four Rivers Charter School being richly served by the people and resources of Franklin County, just as we also see the school being of increasing service to this area and beyond.

Design of the school's educational program: curriculum, methods and sources

The curriculum of Four Rivers Charter School is both comprehensive and focused. It is comprehensive in its commitment to be aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks for succcess in the MCAS and strong preparation for college, as well as in its commitment to character education for moral and social responsibility. It is focused in its determination to work intensively with the three themes of nature, technology and community, and through those themes to provide an uncommonly effective education to its students in grades 7 through 12.

The core academic curriculum of English, History/Social Science, Mathematics and Science will be taught in daily classes by teams of teachers. Scheduling will be flexible, but typically there will be two 100-minute blocks, one devoted to Humanities (including English and History) and one to Math and Science, with two teachers working with approximately 30 students in each, for a 1:15 teacher-student ratio. The teachers involved will have a significant amount of common planning time each week. Classes will sometimes function as separate sessions on English, History, Mathematics and Science devoted to skills and basic content instruction, and at other times will be closely coordinated as thematic, interdisciplinary units called learning expeditions.

Instruction in Spanish will be offered to most students several times each week, and there will be periods for study skills and support for those students needing more help in particular areas. Physical education will also be a regular part of the program. Four afternoons each week there will be an additional longer period devoted to explorations in nature and technology, sometimes connected directly to a theme of study going on in the Humanities or Math/Science classes and sometimes unrelated to them. Students will meet in advisory groups twice each week and have community meetings for the whole school at least weekly.

A vital and distinctive feature of the educational program will be our learning expeditions, developed from the highly-regarded model of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, an organization with whom we are related in an exploratory stage. Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound currently works with 109 elementary, middle and high schools across the country to foster comprehensive school reform, and research has documented its success in bringing about significant improvements in student achievement, instructional practices, school culture and professional development. As conceived by Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, learning expeditions are long-term, in-depth investigations of a topic that engage students through authentic projects, fieldwork, and service. The students'work within learning expeditions centers on rigorous academic achievement, critical thinking, essential skills and habits, personal development, and high-quality original work. Deeply consistent with the approach of Four Rivers Charter School, learning expeditions develop from

guiding questions and are carefully designed to meet the appropriate learning standards of that grade. We anticipate two learning expeditions of six to nine weeks each year, at least one of which will have immediate relevance to the school's themes of nature, technology and community. Given the small size of our school, the flexibility of the schedule, and the importance we place on the goals embedded in the Expeditonary Learning model, a class might well spend three hours or more each day engaged in their learning expedition. It is an intensive and highly active way to learn, matching the way most adolescents learn best.

What might a learning expedition at Four Rivers Charter School look like? For one example, imagine an 8th grade learning expedition studying the Deerfield River, one of the four major rivers in Franklin County from which our school gets its name. The expedition would involve English, History, Science and Math, with a curricular focus on the ecology of the Deerfield watershed, energy production, local history, and community needs. Guiding questions might ask *How has the Deerfield become one of 'most used' rivers in Massachusetts while also being ranked one of its cleanest? What is the impact on the river of multiple uses for environmental, energy and recreation needs? Is the river as healthy as it could be? How do we measure 'health' in a river?* Activities could include study of water quality, recent episodes of toxic spills, current and historical patterns of generating power on the river, review of a landmark usage agreement among generating companies, recreational and environmental interests, and varying ways the river has been regarded from Native American days to the present. Contrasts could be made with the Millers River, another important river in the county that has suffered severe pollution.

Another example, drawn from an established Expeditionary Learning school in Colorado, is a 9th/10th grade expedition on the Scientific Revolution and Galileo, with a curricular base in physics and astronomy. Guiding questions include *Is technology responsible for revolutionary change? Why were Galileo's observations so radical as to force the Church to imprison him? How do lenses change the things we see? How does the moon move about the Earth and what are lunar phases?* Activities or tasks could be an in-depth study of Galileo's life, his times and the lives of important earlier astronomers as a preface to his discoveries. A simple telescope could be built and close observations made of the moon's changes over time. Discussions of the impact of revolutionary technology on our world would flow from the expedition. (From *Guide for Planning a Learning Expedition,* Campbell et al, ed., Kendell Hunt, 1998, pp 51-64.)

Both examples illustrate how the school's central question about the interrelationship of nature, technology and community can be explored in many directions. The Deerfield River expedition works with our question in a local, immediate way. The expedition on the Scientific Revolution and Galileo explores the same question in a large, historical context that affected the way human beings regard themselves and the cosmos. Both invite rigorous learning in which students investigate, speculate, and ultimately seek answers to important questions stirred by their study. It is also important to note that learning expeditions can accommodate a range of learning styles and needs, just because they are so varied and active, with ways that different kinds of intelligence can offer their strengths to the expedition.

Sources for our design of the educational program of Four Rivers Charter School will include:

- Massachusetts curriculum frameworks in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, History and Social Science and World Languages
- National Councils of Teachers of English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Sciences
- International Society for Technology in Education's National Educational Technology Standards
- Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
- The Coalition of Essential Schools
- Local Franklin County school districts' guidelines
- Exemplary practices gathered from our experience, research and many other educators

C. Performance standards

Standards for student performance and consequences when not achieved

The Four Rivers Charter School will articulate standards for student performance based on the learning standards described earlier. These performance standards will be developed in some detail for each subject area at each grade level by the faculty of the school. They will also be clearly conveyed in the quarterly progress reports teachers write for their students in each subject.

An example of the detailed performance standards Four Rivers Charter School faculty will develop can be found in the learning expedition on the Scientific Revolution and Galileo mentioned in the previous section. This physics and astronomy expedition has the following performance standards for a task requiring knowledge of Galileo's discoveries and how his new model of the solar system contrasted with earlier models.

Exemplary: *Student's work demonstrates a thorough understanding of Galileo's observations, development of a new model of the solar system, and comparision with Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Copernicus that provides new insights into models of the solar system.*

Accomplished: *Student's work demonstrates knowledge about Galileo's observations of Jupiter's moons that is accurate and complete; also knowledge of Galileo's new model and and its comparison with the thinking of Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Copernicus that is accurate and complete.*

Developing: *Student's work demonstrates knowledge about Galileo's observations of Jupiter's moons that is incomplete and has some misconceptions; also knowledge of Galileo's new model and its comparison with Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Copernicus that is incomplete and has some misconceptions.*

Beginning: *Student's work demonstrates knowledge about Galileo's observations of Jupiter's moons that has severe misconceptions; also knowledge of Galileo's new model and its comparison with Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Copernicus that has severe misconceptions.*

Detailed performance standards of this kind will inform the progress reports written by the teachers at the end of each quarter of the academic year. These reports will include a letter grade for each subject, rubrics under the categories of "effort," "skills," and "knowledge" keyed to the *exemplary, accomplished, developing,* and *beginning* levels of performance illustrated above, and a narrative comment. The quarterly reports will be mailed to the parents and reviewed by the advisor with each student. They will be the subject of twice-yearly conferences with parents, the student, and the advisor. Letter grades on the reports will carry the following meaning:

A	Student's work is exemplary in all aspects, showing knowledge, skills and effort of a high order and significant initiative in pursuing learning beyond the core expectations for the subject or expedition.
B	Student's work is accomplished in all aspects, showing strong knowledge, skills and effort, and some initiative to learn beyond the core expections for the subject or expedition.
C	Student's work is developing in most aspects, showing knowledge, skills and effort that are acceptable in most areas but may be incomplete in some.
Not Yet	Student's work is beginning to show knowledge, skills, and effort of an acceptable level in some areas but not yet in most areas.
Failing	Student's work shows little knowledge, skill, or effort and is unacceptable.

A grade of **Not Yet** will require the student to do additional work until his or her performance is at least at the C level. Inability to improve Not Yet to level C or better by the end of the school year

will mean the student has to attend an approved summer school in that subject. The student will not be given credit for the course and may not move to the next level if the summer school course grade is below C. If a student receives **Failing** in a course he or she may not move to the next level unless a grade of C or better is earned in an approved summer school course.

Standards for staff performance

At Four Rivers Charter School, excellence will be expected of everyone. Standards for teacher performance will be based on those articulated by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, summarized here.

Standard #1: Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

*Criteria for excellence:*Accomplished teachers...

- understand how students develop and learn
- are aware of the influence of context and culture on behavior
- develop students' cognitive capacity and their respect for learning
- foster students' self-esteem, motivation, character, civic responsibility and their respect for individual, cultural, religious and racial differences

Standard #2: Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.

Criteria for excellence: Accomplished teachers...

- have a rich understanding of the subjects they teach
- appreciate how knowledge in their subjects is created, organized, linked to other disciplines and applied to real-world settings
- develop the critical and analytical capacities of their students

Standard #3: Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

*Criteria for excellence:*Accomplished teachers...

- create, enrich, maintain and alter instructional settings to capture and sustain the interest of their students and to make the most effective use of time
- understand how to motivate students to learn and how to maintain their interest even in the face of temporary failure
- can assess the progress of individual students as well as that of the class as a whole
- employ multiple methods for measuring student growth and understanding and can clearly explain student performance to parents

Standard #4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

Criteria for excellence: Accomplished teachers...

- draw on their knowledge of human development, subject matter and instruction, and their understanding of their students to make principled judgments about sound practice
- ground decisions not only in the literature, but also in their experience
- strive to strengthen their teaching by critically examining their practice, seeking to expand their repertoire, deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgment and adapt their teaching to new findings, ideas and theories

Standard #5: Teachers are members of learning communities.

Criteria for excellence: Accomplished teachers...

- contribute to the effectiveness of the school by working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development
- evaluate school progress and the allocation of school resources in light of their understanding of state and local educational objectives
- find ways to work collaboratively and creatively

All teachers and other staff members will write an annual statement of professional goals with specific objectives as school begins and a reflection on professional goals at the end of each year, using the five standards above as a guide to excellence. Teachers and staff members will work with the Director or a designated administrator to ensure progress on their goals. There will be increasingly strict accountability for those not making progress. School personnel policies will make clear that gross failure in any of these standards will result in termination.

D. Assessment system

How baseline achievement data will be collected

Baseline achievement data will be collected in the following ways:

- We will collect all available records from the students' previous schools by having parents sign releases on the application forms. These should include MCAS and other standardized test scores, school reports, IEPs, teacher comments, and other indicators such as attendance patterns.

- Early in their first year all new students will be given a teacher-designed baseline skills and content knowledge assessment in the core academic areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, History and Social Science, and Science and Technology.

- New students will be given the Stanford-9 or another nationally-normed test to establish baselines in Math, Reading and Writing, unless their records already include recent scores in these areas.

- Other elements of a baseline will be established as students move through the first cycles of assessment described below.

Internal and external instruments to measure student progress

Our continual assessment system will include the following *internal* measures:

- Internally-developed assessments of writing, reading and math will be made at the beginning, middle, and end of each year by the core subject teachers and reviewed by the faculty against school and state standards.

- Individual progress reports will be delivered quarterly to students and their parents, in which each academic subject is assessed with letter grade, plus a number of rubrics in the areas of "effort," "skills," and "knowledge" with performance indicators, and a narrative comment. These quarterly assessments also include an advisor's report with a narrative comment and rubrics focusing on qualities of character exhibited compared with the school's standards. There will be conferences with the advisor, parents and the student scheduled twice a year, and more often if needed.

- Through their observations, grades and other indicators of student work, teachers will note when a student has slipped suddenly to unsatisfactory levels or failing levels. The teacher will confer with the student and his or her parents, as well as with other teachers of the student. Closer monitoring and support of the student's work by the advisor or teacher may then be necessary, with more frequent parent contact.

- Portfolios will be an important source of assessment, offering an ongoing, tangible record of student accomplishments, evidence of how it is valued, opportunity for the student to reflect on his or her work, and a powerful tool for parent or faculty conferences, as well as for student conferences. Over time, a student's portfolio becomes a valued and effective measure of his or her progress, as well as an indicator of grade-level or school achievement.

- Presentations and exhibitions, which will be a culminating activity in learning expeditions, will often include community members and visiting experts. They may be asked to jury presentations along with or instead of faculty members. At grade 9 and grade 11 or 12, students will present major projects related to the school's theme--and essential to their progress in school-- and review of these projects will be made by a panel of community members and experts in the field.

- In connection with their quarterly progress reports, with portfolios and periodic presentations, and at other times, students will reflect on their own and peers' work. This may be done through written comments, rubrics, or discussions. With time, the students will increasingly internalize the school's standards of high achievement, and many of them will become their own best assessors.

- Visitors to the school will periodically be asked to complete a form on which central qualities of character and school culture, such as respect and kindness, will be addressed. Their spontaneous impressions will be valuable in assessing the school's progress in the more subjective areas of character development and school culture. The same kind of assessment may be asked from community members with whom the students work on learning expeditions and service projects.

Our assessment system will also include these important *external* measures:

- The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exams will be administered in the required subjects at each grade specified, and the results will be an important measure of individual and school-wide progress.

- In grades where there is not an MCAS exam administered in English Language Arts or Mathematics, the school will administer a Stanford-9 or similar standardized test in order to have yearly external indicators of student progress in these two fundamental areas and to allow thoughtful comparison of our students with students in other schools. As the school builds its high school program, the PSAT and SAT may serve the same purpose.

Lastly, in the culture of excellence we seek for Four Rivers Charter School, the faculty will regularly reflect on and critique their own progress, both individually and as a group, in doing all they can to guide our students to their highest levels of achievement.

We believe this combination of internal and external assessments will hold students and teachers to the school's high standards for progress. As a minimum after our first year, we will expect every student to show progress on the MCAS by 10% from their previous exam. With more time, we will expect every student to score at least on the proficient level in the MCAS exams. We also expect they will show improvement on any other standardized test, such at the Stanford-9, the school has administered. As importantly, we will count on our internal indicators of progress, and where we fail to see progress we will adjust to ensure there is progress for every student.

III. How will the school demonstrate organizational viability?

A. Market analysis

1. Statement of need

Franklin County is the most poor and rural county in Massachusetts. Once home to thriving industry, it has experienced the economic hardship shared by many communities in New England

as agriculture declined, manufacturing plants and mills closed, and economic opportunity shrank. Most of the towns here are small and sparsely populated, and many have the virtue of small-town life: close-knit communities with families that go back several generations. Compared to Hampshire County, its southern neighbor in the Pioneer Valley which is host to four colleges, one university, three malls, office parks, light industry and a dense, transient population, Franklin County seems like another world altogether.

Most of the towns here have their own elementary schools but their populations are too small to support a middle or high school, and thus there are five regional middle/high schools: Mohawk Trail in the western part of the county, Gill-Montague near the center, Frontier on the southern edge, Pioneer Valley to the north, and Ralph C.Mahar in the east. Greenfield, with a population of 19,000, is by far the largest town in the county and has its own middle school and high school. The elementary schools in Franklin County are well regarded: some have especially good reputations for their practices and teachers; parents seem satisfied with the quality of their programs; the students do as well on state testing as their counterparts in Hampshire County. But Franklin County middle and high schools are not performing as well. While 60% of students in Hampshire County attend four-year colleges after graduating, only 44% of the students who graduate from Franklin County high schools are going on to four-year colleges. By comparison, the 1999 state average for high school graduates who went on to four-year colleges was 52.8%. The percentage of students who take the SAT and the scores of those who do are significantly lower than those of students in Hampshire County, and the drop-out rates here are higher.

Save for school choice and some special programs for underachieving students, there are few public alternatives for middle or high school students in the county. Independent schools are an option for those who can afford them, and home-schooling is growing. We see the need for a small public middle/high school that will offer a strong college preparatory program and focus on themes that are significant to our times and to the rural character and small-town community spirit that is so much a part of life in Franklin County. We have chosen the themes of nature, technology and community in order to create a meaningful, symbiotic relationship between the mission of the school and the interests and needs of a region that is profoundly invested in preserving its natural beauty, is in need of a more technologically sophisticated workforce and has a population deeply commited to the integrity of its communities.

Limiting our enrollment to 180 students is particularly important, given that the smallest of the regional schools has 700 students. By having a smaller student body we can continue the strong community spirit many of these students have experienced in elementary school and create an environment where every student is known and valued. With a lower student/teacher ratio, teachers can more readily serve as mentors, and students will benefit from working closely with faculty in small advisory groups.

Why a charter? We believe that the size of our school and the need for flexibility in designing and implementing the fieldwork and service aspects of our curriculum are best achieved through a charter, and as a charter school we can be available to many families who need something else and cannot afford a private school. We have decided to pursue a Commonwealth charter in order to serve as a regional school, thus guaranteeing that all 26 towns in the county may benefit from our presence and with the hope that no single district will be unduly burdened with loss of revenue.

B. School governance and management

1. Capacity

Briefly explain how the founding group came together to form this school.

From their experience founding an alternative middle school in Greenfield, Ed and Claire Blatchford and Debbie Shriver were convinced of the need for fresh educational options in Franklin

County. Susan Durkee, coming to the same conviction from her experiences teaching recent graduates of Franklin County high schools at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, met with Ed, Debbie and others committed to founding a charter school for Franklin County. John Bickart, a computer software consultant and science teacher with whom Ed had worked previously, also joined the group enthusiastically. The core founding group is drawing on the skills and experience of a range of advisors, several of whom are prospective board members. Recognizing powerful affinities in our mission with the work of Expeditionary Learning Learning Outward Bound, founding group members recently began an exploratory consulting relationship with Expeditionary Learning's Katrina Abbott and Steven Levy, whom three in the group have known for years.

Founding group:

John Bickart, technology consultant and software developer; teacher of physics, chemistry, math and computers. BS, MA, Education

Claire H. Blatchford, writer, teacher, co-founder, Uplook School, Greenfield, MA; currently teaching at Clarke School for the Deaf. BA; MA, Education; MA, Special Education

Edward Blatchford, teacher and administrator, former head of 220-student independent school in Connecticut for10 years, served on Board of Connecticut Association of Independent Schools; co-founder and director of Uplook School; currently adjunct instructor at Greenfield Community College. BA, MA, English; MS, Special Education.

Susan Durkee, teacher of writing at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and other area colleges, also experience with elementary school teaching; writer, artist. BFA, MFA, English.

Deborah M.Shriver, teacher, land-use planner, co-founder and teacher, Uplook School; experience as board member on two independent schools; former teacher and administrator, now with the Connecticut River Watershed Council. BA, MA, Education; Masters of City and Regional Planning

Advisors and/or prospective board members:

Allen Davis, Executive Director, Greenfield Community College Foundation, formerly executive director of the United Way of Franklin County, dean and faculty member at Northfield Mount Hermon, co-founder of Western College of Miami University, Ohio

Walker Korby, consultant and teacher of nature awareness, tracking and outdoor living skills; illustrator; instructor for the Wilderness Awareness School

Bernie Kluger, project director, Center for New Media Teaching and Learning, Columbia University; former high school teacher, co-CEO and founder of software development company

Daniel LaRose, professor of psychology and human ecology, senior faculty member, Greenfield Community College; developer of highly-regarded Project TEME (Totally Enclosed Modular Environment), an experiential course in human ecology at GCC.

Margaret O'Connor, licensed social worker, counsellor experienced in working with adolescents and their parents

Sandra Thomas, Energy Park Director, Northeast Sustainable Energy Association, Greenfield; board member, Silvio O. Conte Education Foundation; former president, Children with Hyperactivity Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD); pediatric nurse

Lawrence Williams, co-founder and director, Oak Meadow, Inc., one of the largest home-schooling programs nationally

Consultants:

Katrina Abbott, Field Director Northeast, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound; former program director and instructor, Outward Bound.

Steven Levy, consultant, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound; former teacher, author, 1992-93 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year.

2. Organizational structure

How the school will be governed

Four Rivers Charter School will be governed by a Board of Trustees, which will have the responsibility for ensursing the school is faithful to the terms of its charter, including setting the school's mission and policies, meeting all legal requirements, seeing that the school is financially healthy and competently administered, and monitoring the accountability and charter renewal processes. The Board will hire and supervise the Director, who will have full responsibility for implementing the mission and policies of the Board and will hire and supervise all staff.

Administrative structure

The Board of Trustees will hold the school to its mission and charter, following established best practices for non-profit boards. The school's educational program and day-to-day operations will be led by the Director. He or she will oversee implementation of the decisions and policies of the Board; lead the faculty and other staff in developing and enacting the educational program and building school culture in accordance with the school's mission; represent the school to parents, the community and the state, and the media; manage admissions; hire and supervise the faculty and staff; contract with and evaluate consultants; and oversee the school's accountability measures and reporting.

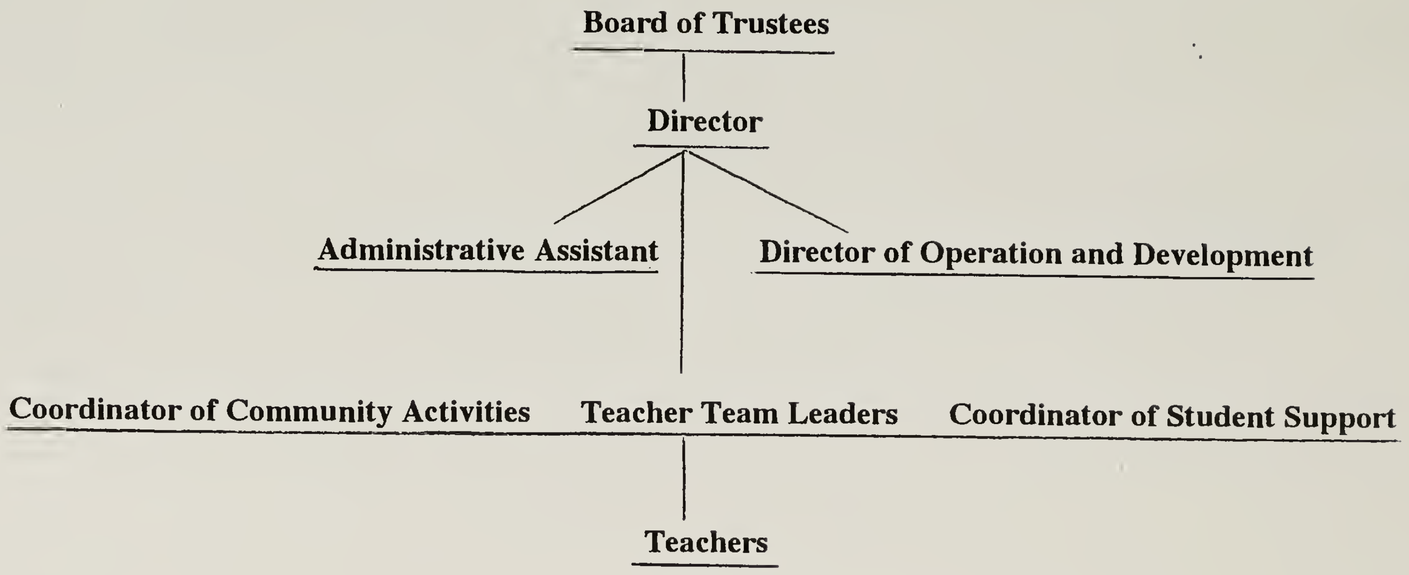
Working with the Director will be an administrative assistant to handle phones, records, attendance, correspondance, transportation, and routine needs of students and parents. She or he will support the Director's various responsibilities and manage the school office.

Also working with the Director will be the Director of Operations and Development, who will have responsibility for financial operations, purchasing, human resource management, insurances, state and federal regulations and reporting, and overseeing non-educational services like the lunch program and maintainance of school facilities. In the early stages of the school, he or she will also coordinate development efforts, including grant writing and fundraising, with support from the Director, the Board and others with specific expertise. As the school grows, the development role will become a separate, full-time position.

An educational team comprised of teacher team leaders (one each from the gr.7-8 team of teachers, gr. 9-10 team, and gr. 11-12 team), a Coordinator of Community Activities (including fieldwork, service, and community relations) and a Coordinator of Student Support (including special education, counselling and health) will work closely with the Director and the rest of the faculty in implementing and monitoring the educational program. In the first years of the school, the Coordinator of Community Activities and the Coordinator of Student Support will be part-time positions, perhaps held by teachers.

The full faculty and staff will meet weekly after school, as well as in various groups or committees, and they will participate in much decision-making, especially around the educational program and school culture.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART


Board of Trustees
Director
Administrative Assistant
Director of Operation and Development
Coordinator of Community Activities
Teacher Team Leaders
Coordinator of Student Support
Teachers